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THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION OR FOREIGN OCCUPATION

Written statement submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 1999]

GE.99-11332 (E)

Right to self-determination for the Syrian Kurds

1. Every right to self-determination is being withheld from the Kurds living in the Syrian Arab Republic, whose areas of settlement in the north of the country lie on the borders with Turkey and Iraq. Their numbers are estimated to be between 1 and 2 million. They live predominantly in three enclaves: in the area around Afrin (the massif of Kurd Dagh), in the region of Ain al-Arab (Kobani), north-east of Aleppo, and in the province of Djazira, rich in raw materials, in the north.

2. In August 1962, a special census was carried out in the province of Djazira. Afterwards, 120,000 Kurds were expelled. They are now stateless. Left with only special identification papers, these Kurds are deprived of normal civil rights. In addition, according to official details, approximately 70,000 Kurds have been declared foreigners, together with 75,000 maktoumeen, likewise stateless Kurds who, unlike those who have been expelled, have never been included in the population register.

3. These people are not allowed to own land, houses, shops or businesses. They are not employed by authorities of State organizations. Education in the schools and universities is closed to them. These stateless Kurds are not admitted to public hospitals. They have no right to food aid during states of emergency. Marriage contracts with Syrian partners are invalid. In addition, they do not possess active or passive rights to vote. Because they do not receive travel documents, they are unable to leave the country legally.

4. In 1963, after the seizure of power by the Baath Party, the head of security of the province of Djazira, Mohammed Talab Hilal, published a 12-point plan, aimed at wiping out the cultural identity of the Kurds. The plan provided for the establishment of a 15-km wide so-called "Arabian belt" along the borders with Turkey and Iraq, as a buffer against the local Kurdish areas. The Kurdish population was to be replaced with Arab dam builders loyal to and armed by the regime, forcibly resettled on the land. This programme was partly realized and allegedly finished in 1976. It continues secretly. From January 1997, the expropriation of 600 families of stateless Kurds is said to have started in northern Syria. The policy of Arabization is pursued single-mindedly.

5. The Kurdish language is not recognized officially. Since 1967, Kurdish place names have been Arabized. Kurdish publications are forbidden, and Kurdish language media are not allowed. Since 1992, children have not been able to be registered with Kurdish names. Whoever professes himself a Kurd in Syria, or demands cultural and political rights for Kurds, is persecuted, imprisoned and mistreated. Among such political prisoners are those who have merely taken part if officially permitted cerebrations of the Kurdish New Year (Newroz) or have spoken Kurdish openly. The Kurdish New Year celebration is only allowed occasionally.

6. In 1995, in the town of Kamishli, 16 men from the Syrian secret service were arrested because they had protested against the expulsion of Syrian Kurds by distributing leaflets. If they ever do come to an official trial, they

will be charged with "opposition to the aims of the revolution" or "publication of false information in order to cause unrest". Torture is commonplace in prison.

7. The Kurds living in Syria are not recognized as a minority, some not even as Syrian citizens. Their cultural and civil rights are withheld from them. The political parties and organizations of the Syrian Kurds are forbidden in Syria and must work underground. Therefore, they have no chance to defend the rights of their people in a democratic way. The right to self-determination is refused them.

8. The Society for Threatened Peoples therefore demands that the Syrian State recognize the Kurds as a minority and as equal citizens. It must return citizenship to the Kurds who have been declared foreigners and stateless. The barriers against the Kurds on the labour market and in the education sector must be lifted, and advice and care with regard to medical treatment must be guaranteed. It must be possible for Kurds to speak their language without restriction and to be able to use and maintain the names given to their children and their place names. The policy of Arabization must be stopped. For this, the continuation of the "Arabian belt" must be halted, and if possible cancelled. Kurdish publications, newspapers or even radio programmes must be allowed, and Kurdish events, such as the Newroz, should be permitted. Finally, the Kurdish parties in Syria should be able to represent themselves in Parliament and to defend their interests and rights on a parliamentary level.